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ABSTRACT

Strategies for principals to increase their assistant principals' involvement in classroom management and to fulfill their positions as instructional leaders are described in this bulletin. Strategies include: (1) introduction, implementation, and reinforcement of classroom management skills; (2) development of partnerships with teachers; (3) understanding and adjusting classroom dynamics; (4) establishing student responsibility; (5) use of a systematic approach to discipline; (6) involvement of all staff to create a positive atmosphere; (7) use of support services; (8) enhancement and motivation of teachers; and (9) assignment of assistant principals to different duties. The strategies stress discipline problem prevention through increased involvement in classroom management. (LMI)

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Tips for Principals from NASSP December 1990

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How To Increase Assistant Principals' Involvement in Class Management

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Tips for Principals from NASSP December 1990

How To Increase Assistant Principals' Involvement in Class Management

Teaching and learning are the objectives in the classroom. However, when some students are allowed to interrupt the learning process every period of the day, every day of the week, 180 days of the year, instruction and learning suffer.

Solving these discipline problems should not be the sole responsibility of the assistant principal. Instead, assistant principals should spend more time in the classroom working with teachers and students to *prevent* discipline problems.

Administrators must recognize the value of empowering assistant principals to be instructional leaders, to help teachers manage their classrooms. For this to happen, the number of disciplinary referrals made to the assistant principal must be reduced.

Principals should encourage assistant principals to become more involved in class management and to use the following strategies to reduce disciplinary referrals:

Introduce, implement, and reinforce classroom management skills

- Develop a partnership with teachers
- Understand and adjust classroom dynamics
- Establish student responsibility
- Use a systematic approach to discipline
- Involve everyone in creating a positive environment.
- Use support services when necessary
- Enhance and motivate teachers
- Assign assistant principal to different duties.

These strategies will benefit not only the teacher, but also the students, as disruptions will decrease and their learning time will increase.

Assistant Principals as Instructional Leaders

Assistant principals, by working with teachers in their classrooms, can and should fulfill their position as instructional leaders. They can do this in several ways.

1. Introduce, implement, and reinforce classroom management skills.

Assistant principals must work directly with teachers and students in the classroom. They must identify management strengths in relation to discipline and reinforce appropriate management techniques so improvement can be built on these strengths.

Assistant principals should stress that teachers must attempt to handle student discipline problems through effective classroom management, not by sending students to the assistant principal's office at the first sign of trouble. Students should know that their teachers are in control of the classroom. Teachers should try to work with the students and parents first. If all else fails, they should then involve the assistant principal.

Assistant principals can also work with teachers to ensure that discipline policies are consistent schoolwide and therefore create an atmosphere in which students and teachers know what behavior is expected in and out of the classroom. This consistency also creates a more cohesive, collegial staff, because all staff members are operating within the same structure and expectations.

In addition, assistant principals may recruit teachers who manage their classrooms well to serve as resources for their colleagues.

2. Develop a partnership with teachers.

There must be ongoing, honest, and open communication among the assistant principal and teachers about what strategies work with regard to instruction, classroom management, and problem solving. In addition, both the assistant principals and the teachers must periodically analyze what strategies have worked and then monitor their actions. Teachers must view the assistant principal as a partner, a team member who is available and willing to help them perform their job better.

3. Understand and adjust classroom dynamics.

Assistant principals can also give teachers the opportunity to see how they can avoid creating situations that promote discipline problems. For example, teachers must realize that presenting unmotivational lessons, forcing students to back down in front of their peers, or denying students acceptable opportunities to express their feelings can cause students to retaliate and disrupt the teaching-learning process.

Furthermore, students should understand that they can play a major role in helping motivate their fellow classmates. This might deter some misbehavior.

4. Establish student responsibility.

Many classroom behavior problems can be prevented in advance by bringing out student potential for learning

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by helping them to:

- Develop self-understanding and positive self-esteem
- Understand and strive to fulfill their own personal and educational aspirations
- Develop positive feelings of self-worth which contribute to responsible behavior, personal growth, health, and physical well-being
- Take full advantage of opportunities to explore, develop, and express their own uniqueness and creativity.

By focusing on student self-management and self-discipline, teachers can encourage students to take responsibility for themselves and focus on a positive relationship in the classroom. The assistant principal can review or help teachers develop the strategies for teaching these skills.

5. Use a systematic approach to discipline.

Referrals to the assistant principals should be few and far between. They should only occur when the situation is uncontrollable or when the teacher has exhausted all strategies in dealing with discipline.

To allow for better classroom management where the teacher can handle his or her own discipline, the assistant principal should encourage teachers to employ the following strategies:

- In-class warnings
- After-class conferences
- After-school conferences
- Phone calls to parents
- Referrals to counselors and other support services.

6. Involve everyone in creating a positive atmosphere.

Strict guidelines must be set as to what disciplinary actions the assistant principal handles. A discipline committee composed of students, staff members, and administrators should determine what constitutes a major or minor infraction. The committee members should also compile a list of general rules and regulations that should be shared with teachers, students, and parents.

At the beginning of each school year, the entire behavior code should be presented to all students. Copies should be sent home for parents to sign and return to school. Consistent enforcement of these rules and periodic reminders to everyone are essential for effectiveness.

7. Use support services when necessary.

When chronically difficult students simply refuse to take responsibility for their actions, it becomes necessary to work closely with support services in the school: guidance counselors, social workers, and psychologists.

This kind of intervention will help the teacher, student, administrators, and parents identify the problems that are interfering with the learning process. A regular classroom setting is not the right environment for all students. Early intervention for chronically disruptive students might allow educators to determine the best learning atmosphere for these students. The assistant principal can help determine appropriate support services and work with everyone concerned to ensure that the student receives needed attention.

8. Enhance and motivate teachers.

Both in and outside the classroom, assistant principals must relate to teachers in ways that enhance their potential and motivate them toward their common goals: effective classroom management and instructional improvement.

9. Assign assistant principals to different duties.

One assistant principal should be assigned exclusively to aid in instructional improvement and classroom management while other assistant principals work with disciplinary referrals and other administrative duties. This split in duties allows the assistant principal assigned to instructional leadership more time in the classroom.

A Valuable Partnership

Acquiring the necessary time that the assistant principal needs to work with teachers in the classroom could make the difference between an effective classroom and one in which learning suffers.

The assistant principal plays a role in making the difference between an outstanding classroom and a poor one.

Assistant principals must spend more time evaluating teachers and improving classroom management. To do this, they must redirect their time and energy. They must know the difference between good and poor classroom management and understand what is required technically to modify conditions to be able to achieve a sound learning environment for every student.

Assistant principals must take the time to assess and evaluate teachers based on knowledge of effective education and managerial practices. They must give the teacher and the students the responsibility to take control of their own behavior.

By assessing and working with teachers, by helping them to interact with students in a positive way, by creating an environment that encourages students to be productive members of society, by reinforcing classroom management techniques, assistant principals regain their rightful place as instructional leaders.

Written by Deloris Ramsey Hunter, reading consultant and former intern assistant principal at Bulkeley High School, Hartford, Conn.

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